

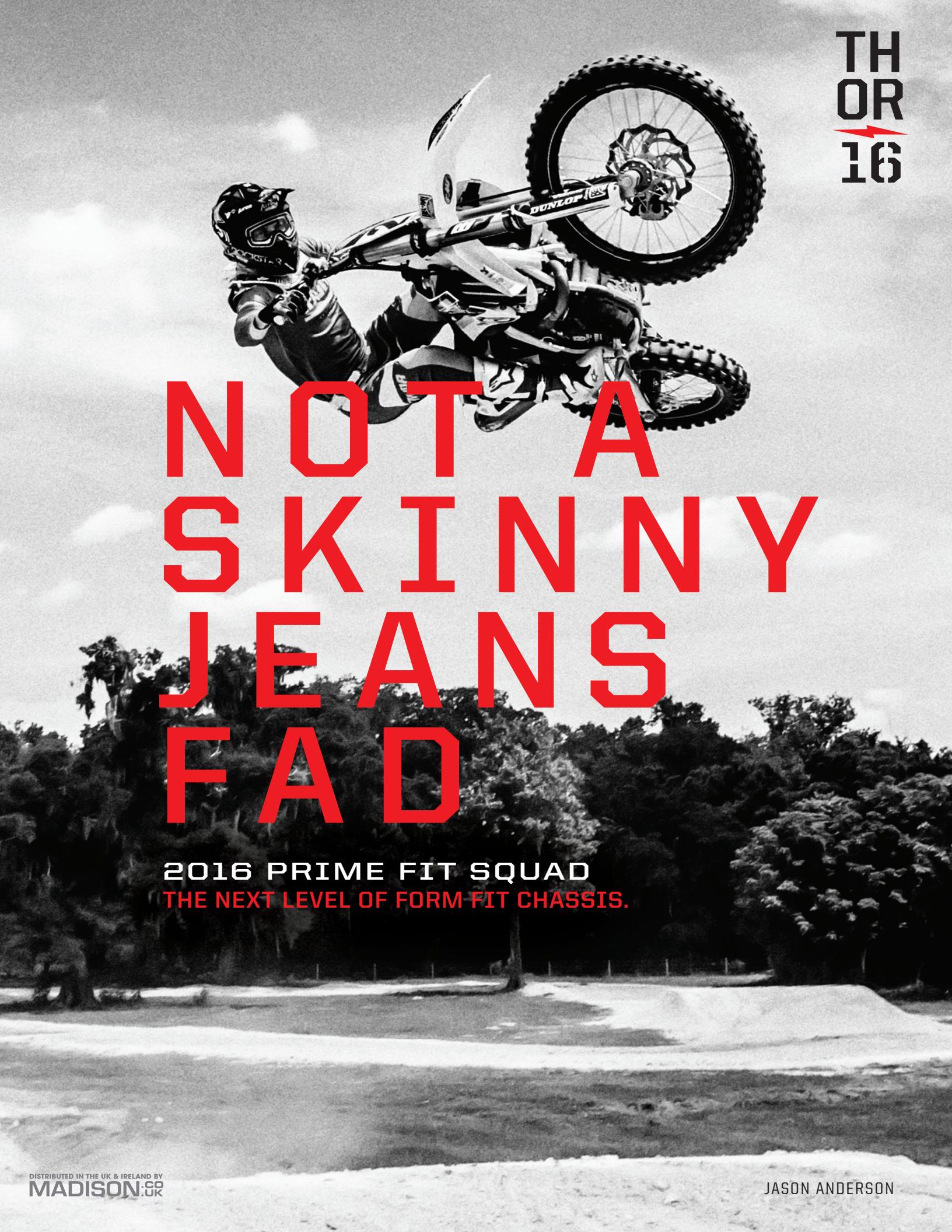
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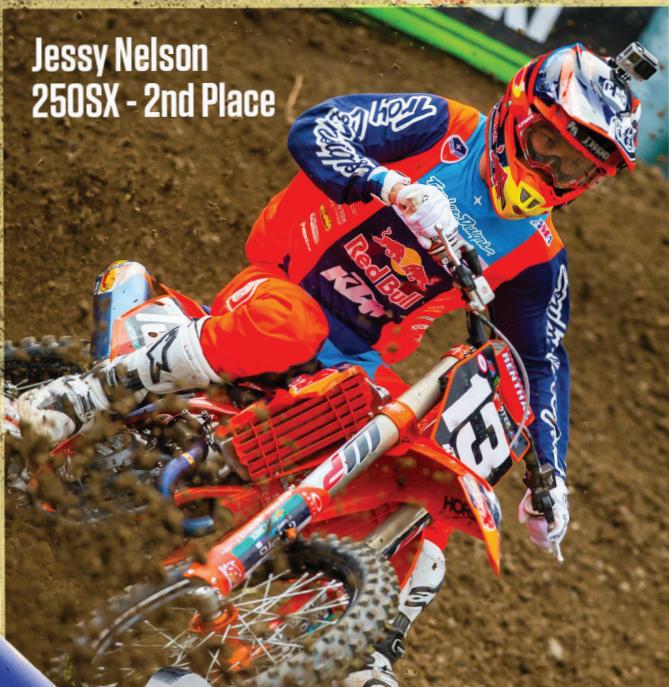
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Defending the Crown

Story Geoff Meyer images Yamaha

World MXGP champion Romain Febvre goes into the 2016 season as a little of a question mark. Can the Frenchman continue his amazing run and beat the likes of Antonio Cairoli, Clement Desalle and Ben Townley? Will he do a David Philippaerts who had an incredible 2008, only to struggle injury many of the seasons afterwards? Whatever happens Febvre will enter this new season as one of the favorites and in many people's eyes he is special, and might even take down the legendary Cairoli when the two are on even terms.





We asked him about some important moments in his golden season, from his first GP victory, to his MXoN domination. It was special, and goes down as one of the best seasons by a GP rider in the history of the sport.

2015 results

For sure I surprised myself and also the team, everyone. Last year I had a good year, I finished third, but I made many mistakes. I learned a lot from that. Just the winter was not so great for me. I had two injuries—one on the shoulder, one on my back. I lost two months of riding and just took it easy the first few months to not be injured again. I just take some points. I knew that with some preparation and more setup on the bike, I would be even better. It started really fast with some podiums then win some moto's and GP [overall win] and it's pretty insane. Still, I didn't realize now I'm World Champion of MXGP. Everybody around me, they are talking about that, and I'm like, "Oh, yeah, that's true." It's nice for sure. Every week after the title, I realize more and more, so that's really good. Again, I need to be focused for des Nations, and after I can take some time off.

2015 moments

Yeah, like, my first podium and first moto I won and the first GP I won also, all those guys were still there. Just Villopoto missed France, also England for sure, but I passed Desalle and Cairoli when they were fit. So that was good for me, and I knew that I had the speed. When you start to win some moto's and everything, you get the confidence, and it's a lot in this sport. It was good.

MXoN memories

I gave 100%, I was at the top of my level. The first moto it might have looked like I was good,

but I didn't feel comfortable and I was really tight and really careful everywhere I rode. To win the moto was good, but I didn't feel that great. The second moto was much better, I was riding really well, but Ben Townley was just unbelievable, really good. I caught him and passed him, I saw he was staying behind me, and I wanted to just make a gap, maybe a few seconds, but it was impossible to make a gap. I gave 100% and we were so well prepared for this race.

MXoN pressure

You know, normally on a GP I don't have any pressure, even fighting for a GP win or the title, I never felt pressure, but this weekend I felt it for sure. Mainly because of the crowd, 30,000 or 40,000 waiting for the victory and you could feel that. It was my first MXoN and I didn't know what to expect, even on Saturday we won all the moto's and then the crowd expected a win for sure and they trusted us. It was great.

Townley back

Sure, you know, I love racing and if some American guys or Townley wanted to race that is good for us. In Glen Helen he showed something, but at the MXoN he was really good. I think he led his qualification race for some time and he was strong in both moto's on Sunday and he has the speed and the condition. I think it is a good thing he comes back to MXGP.

Five Riders - MXGP

A year ago they were saying that the MXGP class had the toughest field of riders ever, well guess what, 2016 is even tougher. This year's MXGP championship is massive in the context of depth. Six former or present motocross world champions in the class, and a lot of young riders coming through to try and seek their own glory.

I doubt anyone would be willing to bet who is going to win the season opener in Doha, Qatar in five weeks' time, and I know for sure picking the winning is nearly impossible. Names







Cairolí, Desalle, Paulin, Nagl, Gajser, Guillod, Townley, Strijbos, Bobryshev and Tixier make this the most demanding motocross series in the sport and one that is producing the most amazing racing.

We thought we would look at five riders we think will make a big splash in 2016.

Romain Febvre: The defending champion and possibly the future king of this class. With a year of experience, and a world title already in his pocket the smiling, quiet Frenchman must be in a good place. Another year on his factory Yamaha 450cc machine and a new deal with clothing giant Alpinestars and you can bet Febvre will look the goods this season.

Antonio Cairolí: Still seems weird putting his name behind anyone's, as he has been the master of the class for a bunch of years now. His determination to come back from an injury riddled 2015 season would seem enough to make him a heavy favorite to regain his MXGP title. The years are catching up with the legendary Italian, but riders like Cairolí always pull something special out of their pocket and 2016 might just see him claim world title number nine.

Gautier Paulin: Preparing in America with famous American trainer Aldon Baker sounds like the second of the leading French riders is more serious than ever with his efforts. Paulin shows consistency in 2015, and although his speed was down somewhat compared to 2014, he will have learnt more about his HRC machine and figured out some bugs he might have had. He is also recovered from his knee injury.

Clement Desalle: The tough Belgian rider lines up with the Monster Energy Kawasaki team, and while the team still probably has nightmares about their 2015 season, Desalle will make sure this bad dreams end quickly. One of the most determined riders in the world and a multiple GP winner. Can the Belgian win his country their first world motocross championship in nine years?

Tim Gajser: Throwing the youngster under a bus here. Coming into the toughest series in the world after his MX2 championship success is going to be difficult. He has the style to move nicely into the big boy class, and with HRC backing his every move he has the right support. If he can handle the rough and tumble of the MXGP class, then his natural talent will shine. Hopefully some strong results in Qatar and Thailand, will give him the confidence to run up front often.

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DEFIANCE

Story Geoff Meyer images Yamaha

Yamaha Factory rider Chad Reed isn't somebody to count out. The Australian legend continues to put age aside and stay competitive in the always dangerous AMA Supercross series. His second place finish in the second round of the AMA Supercross championship really showed what a determined person he is. Here are some comments from Reed after his San Diego second place finish.

"The whoops are always my strength and being with Yamaha reminds me how good I was in the whoops in my old days. I think I have a shot at these things, I also felt good in some turns, but I was giving some places up and was riding the limit. I knew I was a comfortable second, I tried to push to the limit, but didn't want to give away a podium.

"I believe life is about timing. If I rewind the clock five years and went back to Yamaha, I don't think the bike was as good and I learnt a lot. I put myself in a position to have fun and be myself and lose a lot of money, but for all the good things. Being back on Yamaha in 2016 is good timing. A good bike, staff and I am in a good time in my career.

"I felt validation for myself, I hear people, but sometimes I felt was a crazy, and my wife says

yet, but the feeling is there and I can't walk away from it. I see Kevin and Ricky who have stepped away and I am not ready to walk away, I want to be racing.

"I have been fortunate have a lot of friends who have retired and you see it, it will be clear when it is time to walk away. I contemplated retirement in the off season and the deal took so long to come together I figures maybe it was over. But the feeling with training was really good. I have a good bike and I think I am a podium guy.

"We worked on the bike before San Diego and made some position changes, but the bike is so different to the bike I won a title on, but the things I learnt as a young pro are things that made me good and it gels with this bike.

"I didn't have a lot of options in the off-season because Cooper (Webb) had a lot of the parts in



Japan and at the MXoN. We ended up getting some parts after those races and the fork setting we worked on before San Diego. Normally I am ok to change some things, but we are in a good window.

"I mean it was a long time coming and something we worked on since the summer. The off season was challenging and it came to what semi I was going to be in. I knew I would be riding Yamaha and I am really happy. Everyone knows the blue and the 22 goes together and all my memories are at Yamaha. It isn't my swansong; it isn't my going away party. I want to win and it's a shame people think I can't win. I don't feel beat up and I wake up wanting to be better and I want to live on the line and try and be the best in the world. While I have that I want to try and do it and I want to prove for the later generation that racing doesn't end at 25. Age will take over at some point, but not today."

"Old or not you can't count out the 22."

"Last year was a testing year. There were a lot of up and downs, and it was an interesting offseason. I'm happy to come to the second race [of 2016] and be on the podium. Last week, I was disappointed with a 6th. I felt I was better than that, but I didn't make the twenty laps count when I needed to. I'm happy with this performance. I got a good start—I worked really hard on starts this week. I hadn't been on the podium since Atlanta 1 last year. And though everybody thinks I'm old and washed up and not really ready to challenge the kids, we as a family are used to being on the podium. We don't like not being on the podium. I guess you learn to be grateful for getting here, because it is hard. There's a lot of bad dudes out here, and I'm blessed to still be able to mix it up with the best in the world."







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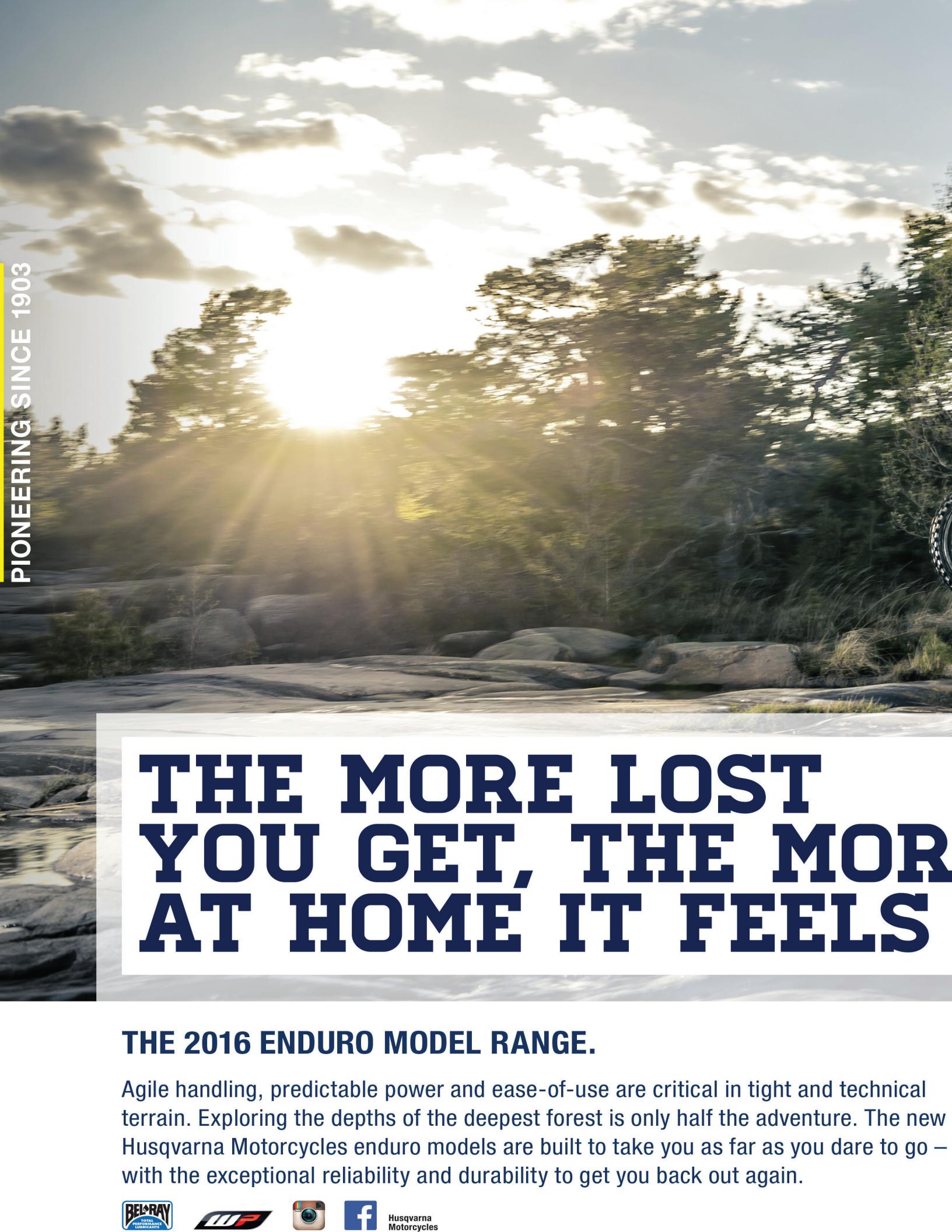
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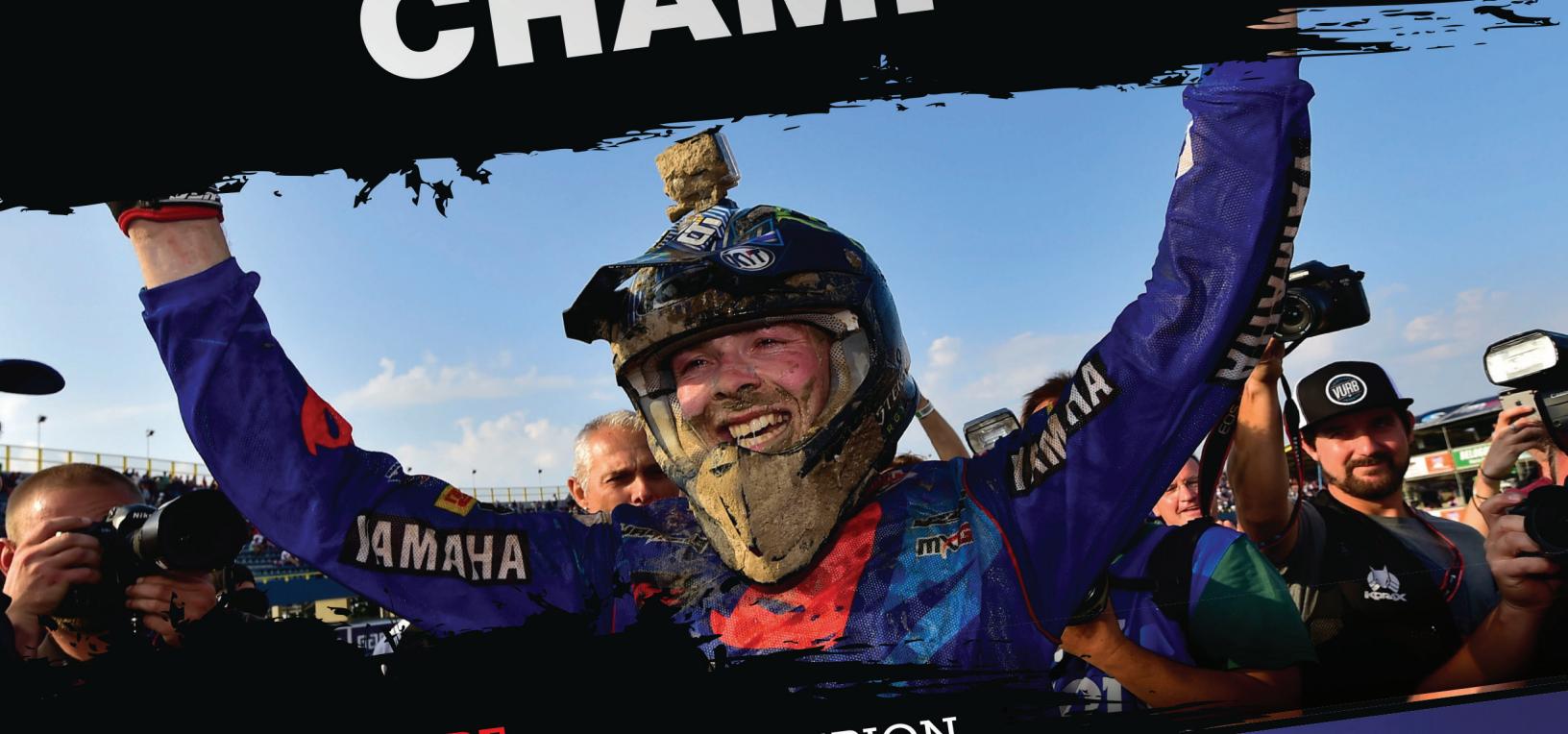
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Older and Wiser

Story Geoff Meyer images Bavo

Evgeny Bobryshev has been around now for some time. At 28 years old the Russian charger continues to improve, although he has struggled for maybe five years with injuries. Currently with German trainer Stephan Nuesser, Bobryshev is working hard in California to prepare for the 2016 season.

Way back in 2005 Bobryshev raced the MX2 world championship, but Bobby's height and build were more suited to riding MX1, which was seen when he made the move over to the premier class with the CAS Honda team for the 2010 season; there were top ten finishes in most events and a third placed race finish in Latvia. This year also saw him win the British MX1 Championship.

Having raced for the Honda Factory team since 2011, a season he scored a GP victory in Germany the friendly Russian has always shown heart and determination, despite often suffering from injuries. Since 2011 though it's been hard work.

2015 was a brilliant year for Bobryshev as he came back from injury to enjoy his best season in MXGP with Team HRC, achieving four podiums and two qualifying race wins to finish third overall in the championship. We caught up with Boby and asked him about his feeling for 2016.

Motocross Illustrated: Evgeny, I understand you are in America training. How's life there?

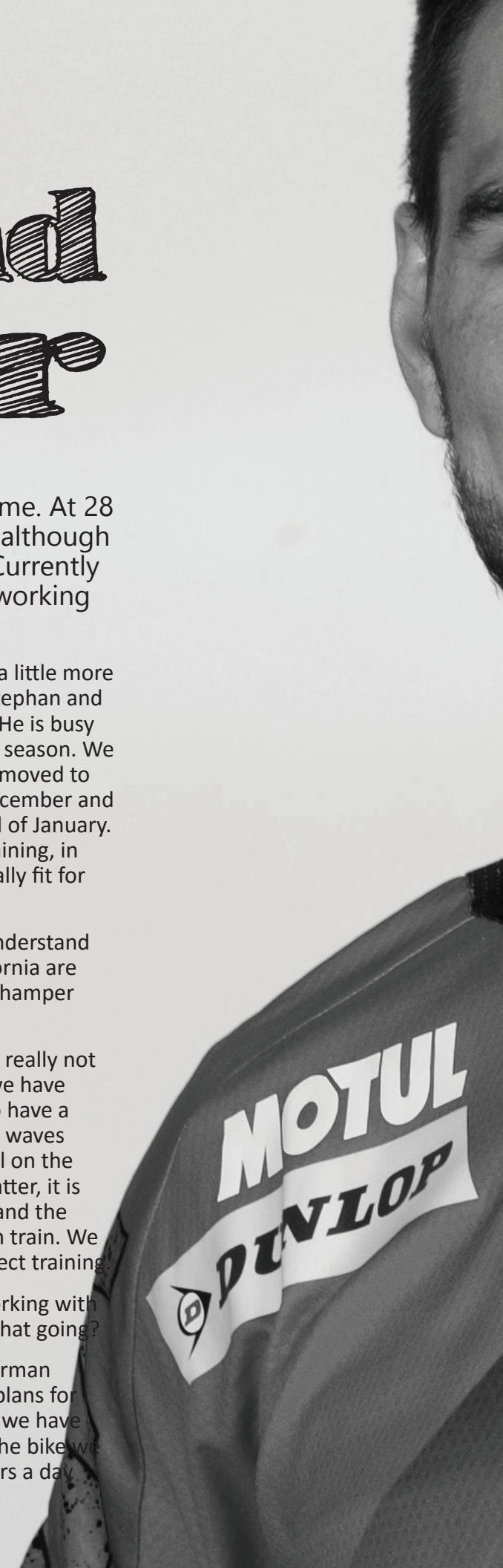
Bobryshev: I moved here a little more than a month ago, with Stephan and he is my full-time trainer. He is busy preparing me for the new season. We started in November, but moved to America in the start of December and we stay here until the end of January. We are riding, physical training, in the gym, cycling, to be really fit for 2016 season.

Motocross Illustrated: I understand a lot of the tracks in California are pretty smooth. Does that hamper your preparation?

Bobryshev: The tracks are really not rough, they are flat, but we have many tracks here, they do have a lot of jumps, and ruts and waves and you can still work well on the bike. For me it doesn't matter, it is important that it's warm and the weather is nice so you can train. We have many tracks for perfect training.

Motocross Illustrated: Working with Stephan Nuesser, how is that going?

Bobryshev: He has the German strategy, he does a lot of plans for the day, one day a month we have off and even after riding the bike we go training, so like six hours a day.









of training. I feel really strong, because in 2015 I was never 100%. I had a bad injury in 2014 and seven months no riding, then I missed the start of the season, and I was consistent, but never on my top level. My physical condition is way better than the last few years. I am feeling very comfortable and fit, but we still have six weeks before Qatar and I will still improve a lot from now.

Motocross Illustrated: How tough was it to get through those seasons of always being injured?

Bobryshev: You know, after 2011 I have only had bad years, I have never been close to my potential, I was in a big hole, and after my big injury last year I changed my goal, to just finish the race and get the points and grow race by race and that is what happened. I was really happy with 2015, I finished the year healthy and I could put a big effort for 2016 and I am really motivated for that.

Motocross Illustrated: I can imagine it took a big toll on your confidence.

Bobryshev: I had no confidence, it was a tough time and the last injury with my leg, but I am the sort of person who never gives up and just moves forward to come back. After 2015 I am really confident again and I am back to how I was in 2011.

Motocross Illustrated: You were often riding over our head in the past. A few years older and all the experiences with injury seem to have settled you down.

Bobryshev: I was sometimes crazy, pushing too much and it cost me, but now I changed my way of riding, slower and it's a long season and you have to be smart. Not get mistakes and just

be clear and be consistent, that is the main thing, and what I needed. We have a tough competition in MXGP, a lot of really good guys and week after week the winner changes and it's just so tough, it is like the lottery sometimes.

Motocross Illustrated: It seems like the GP riders now are much better in their mental preparation now. I would even say the riders now are more mentally prepared than ever before. How important do you see the mental side of the sport now?

Bobryshev: It is, much more important, I agree. We need to have a really good condition, mentally and also the speed. At the start the riders are pushing so hard, I think that is why we have so many injuries. Everyone is on another level than ever before.

Motocross Illustrated: What do you think of the calendar for 2016?

Bobryshev: It is a lot of flying, and I hate flying, but I still really like the Qatar/Thailand trip, I enjoy that. Argentina is a nice, but it's such a long way and everyone is in the same position. The travel is tough, with the time difference, the weather is different, it makes it really tough, but we have to get used to that.





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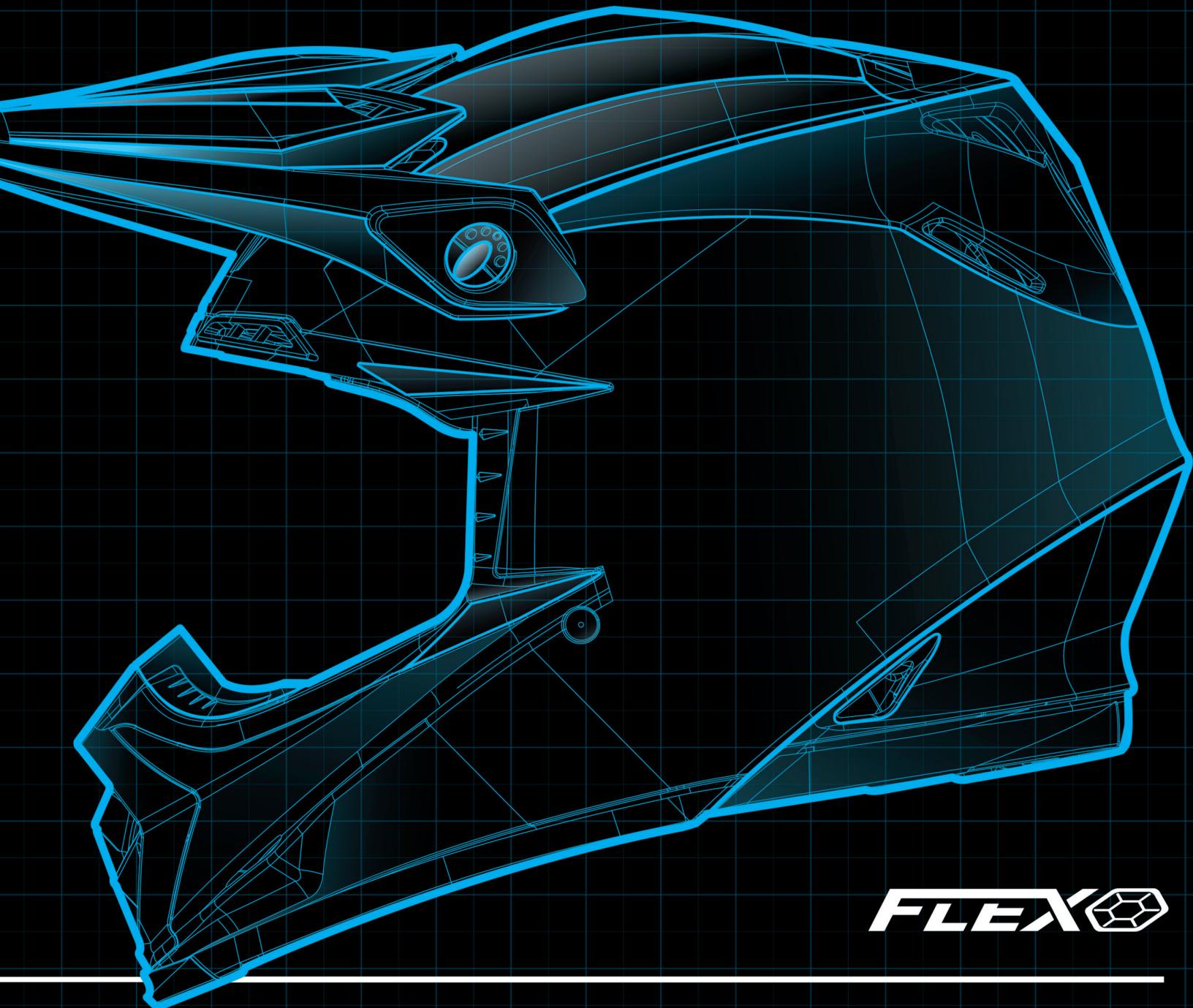
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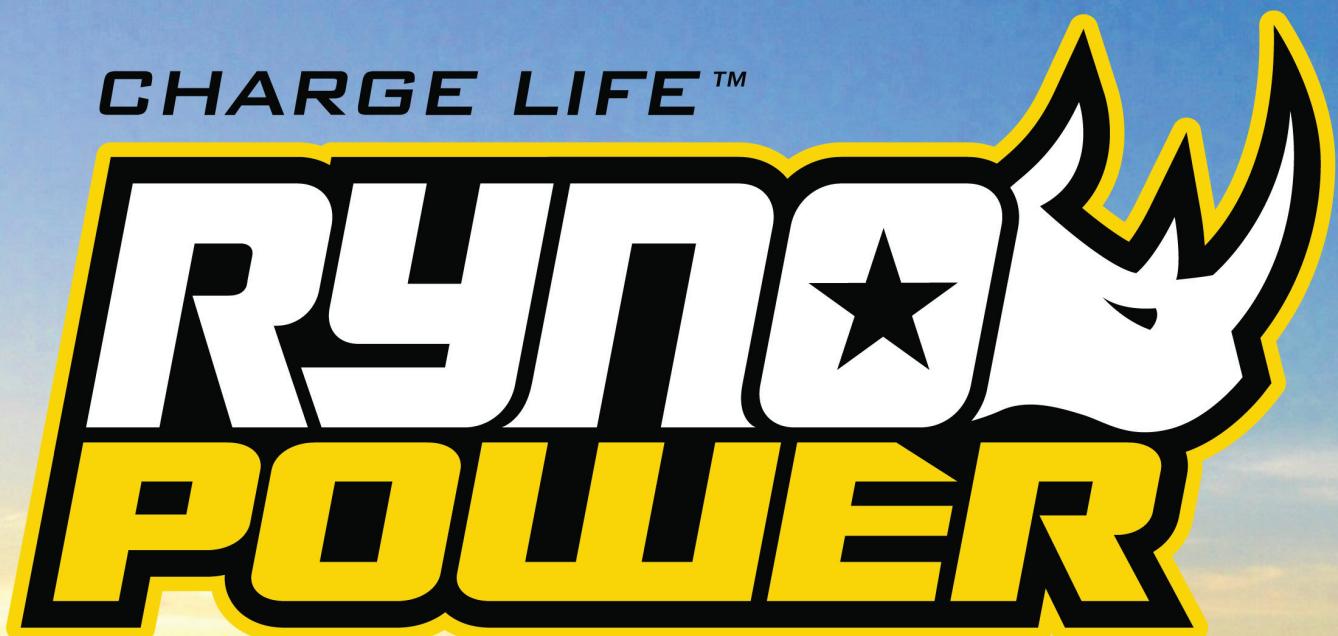








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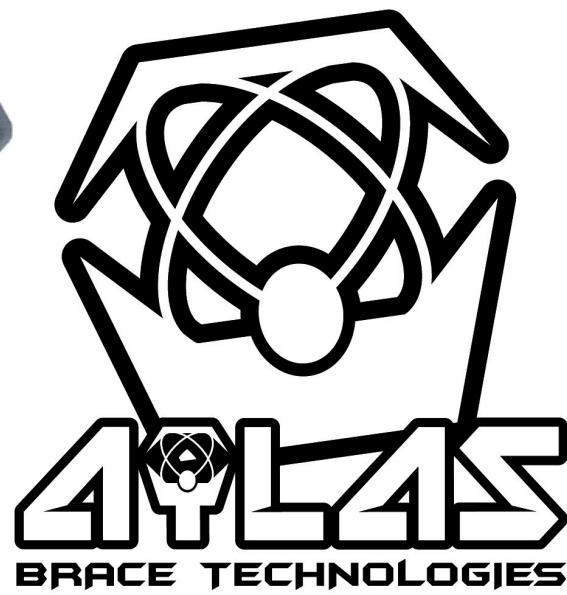
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Return to Glory

Story Geoff Meyer images Suzuki

There can be no denying, the return of former MX2 world champion Ben Townley to the MXGP class is massive. While the question marks will remain until it is seen what the New Zealand has for the toughest motocross series in the world, it is important to understand the interest this move has. Not unlike the arrival of American legend Ryan Villopoto to the MXGP class in 2015, the return of one of the most popular riders of his era will also bring a large audience. Townley might only have a single world title to his name, his talent is unquestionable. Injuries played a major part in the career of the new Suzuki factory rider and you can be sure that he is only returning for one thing, and it's got nothing to do with financial gain.







"Money wasn't a factor," Townley told. "I can't go back to what I was earning at the height of my career and I'm not doing this for financial reasons. I've still got a huge desire to achieve being a world champion again and that outweighs the financial factor. At the same time I had to ensure my family wasn't put in a vulnerable position with this move, but everything stacks up and I'm willing to give it another shot to achieve this goal of mine."

Townley who is now 30 years old arrived on the GP scene as a young kid, looking to achieve something only Shayne King had done, and that was to win a world motocross championship. It will be a tough transition as the MXGP series is now tougher than it's ever been, and while his stunning performance at the 2015 Monster Energy Motocross of Nations was impressive, Townley knows as well as anyone that doing 18 rounds of MXGP isn't going to be easy.

In Sweden in 2002 Townley picked up his first ever GP victory, it was the first sign that he was going to be a force in the MX2 championship in future years. 2003 though and when Stefan Everts decided to race the 125/MX2 rounds to prepare for the MotocrossGP/MXGP class it was goodnight for GP victories for Townley. He did however come out swinging in 2004, on a brand new KTM machine, that saw several engine failures Townley won 21 of the 26 moto's he finished, he also had six DNF's, but still won the championship by 116 points over close friend Tyla Rattray.

Now back in the MXGP series and with a fresh mind and a new dream the veteran of motocross looks at trying to get another chance. His dream is the same as it was in 2001 when he arrived as a young teenager, he wants to be FIM Motocross World Champion, it is as simple as that.

The motocross world will be watching Mr. Townley, let us hope you can show them just how good you really are.

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